Amendments to the Claims

1.   (Currently Amended) A method for determining one or more relationships between a plurality of users of a network system, the method including the steps of:

a) populating a database with a unique network user identifier for each of the plurality of users,

b) selecting a user and further populating the database with connection data for the selected user from a network access device associated with the selected user to provide unique network user identifiers of users known to the selected user, ~~each such user, searching each user's connection data in the database for a predetermined user's unique user identifier to identify all users that have the predetermined user's unique user identifier in their connection data, and~~

c)   repeating step b) for the remainder of the plurality of users,

d)   for a predetermined user, searching each of the plurality of user's connection data in the database for the predetermined user's unique network user identifier to identify all users that have the predetermined user's unique network user identifier in their connection data,

e)   storing the network user identifiers of the users located by the search of step d), to provide an ~~inbound connection~~ set of data for the predetermined user representative of one or more other user's relationship with the predetermined user, and

f)   providing data from the data setoff step e) to a network access device associated with the predetermined user.

2.   (Cancelled)

3.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 ~~or claim 2~~ where ~~the~~ step d) includes ~~of~~ searching each user's connection data in the database for any additional network user identifiers for the predetermined user ~~a predetermined user's unique user identifier includes searching each user's connection data in the database for any additional user identifiers for the predetermined user~~.

4.   (Cancelled)

5.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding~~ claims 3 ~~including the step of~~ where step f) includes comparing the ~~inbound~~ data set of step e) with the connection ~~set with the connection~~ data for the predetermined user, and providing to a network access device associated with the predetermined user ~~with~~ the network user identifier of any users comprised in the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ which do not comprise part of the predetermined user's connection data.

6.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 5 including the step of providing the predetermined user with the opportunity to include the network user identifiers of any users comprised in the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ which do not comprise part of the predetermined user's connection data in the predetermined user's connection data.

7.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding~~ claims 1 ~~including the step of~~ where step f) includes comparing the connection data of the predetermined user with the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~, and providing to a network access device associated with the predetermined user ~~with~~ the network user identifier of any users comprised in the connection data which do not comprise part of the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~.

8.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 7 including the step of using the network user identifiers of any users comprised in the connection data which are not present in the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ to contact users whose network user identifiers are in the predetermined user's connection data but not in the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ to invite those users to include the predetermined user's network user identifier in their connection data.

9.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding~~ claims 1 including the step of using the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ to provide an indication of the popularity of a user of the network system.

10.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one f the preceding~~ claims 1 including the step of determining whether a <u>network</u> user identifier for a predetermined user has changed, and if a change is detected, <u>performing steps d) and e) and</u> using the user identifiers comprised in the <u>data set of step e)</u> ~~inbound connection set~~ to contact users who have the predetermined user's <u>network</u> user identifier and inform those users of the change in the predetermined user's <u>network</u> user identifier.

11.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding~~ claims 1 including the steps of further populating the database with a user preferred identifier by which a predetermined user prefers to be identified and associating the user preferred identifier with the predetermined user's unique <u>network</u> user identifier ~~and additional user identifiers~~ <u>prior to performing step d)</u>.

12.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 11 ~~including the~~ <u>where</u> step <u>f) includes sending an invitation to a network access device associated with each of the</u> ~~of inviting~~ users that have ~~a~~ <u>the</u> predetermined user's unique <u>network</u> user identifier ~~or additional user identifiers~~ in their connection data to associate the predetermined user's user preferred identifier with the predetermined user's unique <u>network</u> user identifier ~~or additional user identifiers~~ in their connection data.

13.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of the preceding~~ claims 1 including the step of further populating the database with one or more characteristics of each user <u>prior to step d)</u>, ~~and~~ searching the record in the database for each user <u>in the data set of step e)</u> ~~comprised in the predetermined user's connection data~~ for at least one of the characteristics<u>, and providing the network user identifiers of those users having the at lest one characteristics to a network access device associated with the predetermined user.</u>

14. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 13 including the step of searching the record in the database of each user comprised in the connection data of each user comprised in the predetermined users connection data and searching the record in the database and connection data of each user comprised in the ~~data set of step e)~~ inbound connection set and each user comprised in the connection data of each user comprised in the data set of step e) ~~inbound connection set~~ for the at least one ~~of the characteristics or for a given user identifier or user preferred identifier~~.

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Cancelled)

17. (Cancelled)

18. (Cancelled)

19. (Cancelled)

20. (Cancelled)

21. (Cancelled)

22. (Cancelled)

23. (Cancelled)

24. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the steps of:

further populating the database with additional user identifiers of each user, such user identifiers relating to the applicable network system or ~~any~~ other network system;

enabling other users of the network system with one of a predetermined user's user identifiers to request other user identifiers from the system for the predetermined user; and

providing such other users with a predetermined user's additional user identifiers.

25.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the step of ~~providing a means for~~ allowing a predetermined user to mark some or all of their connection data as not accessible to other users of the system to the effect that it would appear to other users of the system that the marked data is not included in the predetermined user's connection data.

26.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the steps of:

providing a plurality of databases ~~connecting databases~~ populated with connection data and connecting the plurality of databases to a centralised database;

populating the central~~ised~~ database with some or all of the connection data from the connected databases;

maintaining synchronisation between the connection data in the centralised database and the connected databases; and

providing a predetermined user's connection data to ~~that~~ the predetermined user through one of ~~any of~~ the connected databases~~, either for restoration to a network access device or otherwise~~.

27.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the steps of:

providing a plurality of databases populated with connection data and connecting the plurality of databases ~~connecting databases populated with connection data~~ directly with each other;

transmitting processing requests ~~(relating to any method as claimed in any one of the preceding paragraphs)~~, from either a predetermined user of a connected database or a process operating on the connected database itself, to the other connected databases;

processing requests received from other connected databases;

transmitting the results of any processing requests to the originating connected database; and

providing the aggregate results received from all connected databases to the predetermined user or process operating on the originating connected database.

28.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the steps of:

<u>providing a plurality of databases populated with connection data and connecting the plurality of databases</u> ~~connecting databases populated with connection data~~ to a central inter-operator exchange;

transmitting processing requests ~~(relating to any method as claimed in any one of the preceding paragraphs),~~ from either a predetermined user of a connected database or a process operating on the connected database itself to the central inter-operator exchange;

transmitting such processing requests from the central inter-operator exchange to the connected databases;

processing requests received from the central inter-operator exchange;

transmitting the results of any processing requests received from the central inter-operator exchange to the central inter-operator exchange;

transmitting results received from connected databases either individually or in aggregate from the central inter-operator exchange to the originating connected database; and

providing the aggregate results received from the central inter-operator exchange to the predetermined user or process operating on the originating connected database.

29.   (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in <u>claim</u> 1 including the steps of:

<u>providing a plurality of databases populated with connection data and connecting the plurality of databases</u> ~~connecting databases populated with connection data~~ to a central data and processing centre;

populating the central database and processing centre with the connection data from the connected databases;

maintaining synchronisation between the connection data in the central database and processing centre and the connected databases;

transmitting processing requests ~~relating to any method as claimed in any one of the preceding paragraphs~~ from a predetermined user of a connected database or a process operating on the connected database itself to the central database and processing centre;

processing requests received from the connected databases;

transmitting the results of any processing requests to the originating connected database; and

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providing the results to the predetermined user or process operating on the originating connected database.

30. (Currently Amended) A computerized apparatus comprising, ~~programmed to implement the method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims.~~

a) means for populating a database with a unique network user identifier for each of the plurality of users,

b) means for selecting a user and further populating the database with connection data for the selected user from a network access device associated with the selected user to provide unique network user identifiers of users known to the selected user,

c) means for repeating step b) for the remainder of the plurality of users,

d) means for a predetermined user, searching each of the plurality of user's connection data in the database for the predetermined user's unique network user identifier to identify all users that have the predetermined user's unique network user identifier in their connection data,

e) means for storing the network user identifiers of the users located by the search of step d), to provide set of data for the predetermined user representative of one or more other user's relationship with the predetermined user, and

f) means for providing data from the data setoff step e) to a network access device associated with the predetermined user.

31. (Currently Amended) Apparatus for determining one or more relationships between a plurality of users of a network system, the apparatus including:

a database populated with a unique network user identifier for each of the plurality of users and with connection data for each such user, the connection data being obtained from a network access device associated with each such user,

a processor adapted to search each user's connection data in the database for a predetermined user's unique network user identifier to identify all users that have the predetermined user's unique network user identifier in their connection data, ~~and~~

a memory ~~means~~ device to store the user identifiers located by the search to provide a data set ~~an inbound connection set~~ for the predetermined user representative of

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one or more other user's relationship with the predetermined user, and wherein the processor is further adapted to provide the data set to a network access device associated with the predetermined user.

32.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 9 including the step of providing the indication of popularity to an operator of a separate network system which is interconnected to the network system.

33.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the step of determining whether a network user identifier for a predetermined user has changed, and if a change is detected, including the new network user identifier in the connection data on the database prior to performing step d).

34.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the step of determining whether a network user identifier for a predetermined user has changed, and if a change is detected, performing steps d) and e) and using the user identifiers comprised in the data set of step e) to send an instruction to a network access device associated with each of the users who have the predetermined user's network user identifier to update the predetermined user's network identifier in their connection data.

35.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 11 where step f) includes sending an instruction to a network access device associated with each of the users who have the predetermined user's unique network user identifier in their connection data to associate the predetermined user's network user identifier with the predetermined user's user preferred identifier in their connection data.

36.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 13 including searching for a given user identifier or a user preferred identifier.

37.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 36 including searching for a given user identifier or a user preferred identifier.

38.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 14 including searching for a given user identifier or a user preferred identifier.

39.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 13 including the step of searching the record in the database of each user comprised in the connection data of the predetermined user for the at least one characteristics.

40.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 1 including the step of synchronizing the connection data stored on the database with the connection data on users' network access devices.

41.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 1 including receiving new connection data from a user's network access device which includes changes from the connection data for that user present on the database, and including the new connection data in that user's connection data on the database prior to step d).

42.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the plurality of users comprise a subset of users of the network system.

43.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 42 including the step of detecting any users added to the subset and providing the other users in the subset with the unique user identifier of the added user.

44.   (New) A method as claimed in claim 42 including the step of detecting any users removed from the subset and notifying any other member of the subset that has the removed user's unique identifier in their connection data.